2006 Summer Intern Program: Training tomorrow's work force

In 1999, Cathy Riddle was an intern at Idaho National Laboratory. Seven years later, she's a mentor to Audrey Roman, and they're making revolutionary ventures together.

This is Audrey's second undergraduate summer internship. She and Riddle are working on different variables for the breakthrough Fission Product Extraction Process, called FPEX. The viability of this process depends on their research. It could save the U.S. and other nations billions of dollars, allow for compact storage of unusable nuclear fuel in Yucca Mountain and extend its usability to 300 years.

INL has over 250 interns each summer. Not only do they provide crucial support to the nation's research needs and find potential employment opportunities, but they gain the advantage of doing real work rather than simply *reading* a textbook, giving them a definite edge in the classroom.

"I have experienced a lot here and it's helped me at U of I. For instance, working in the lab has given me a lot of extra experience, a lot of hands on. I've gotten more here than I would have probably anywhere else," said Roman. "I've also gotten to know a lot more of the equipment, a lot more of the machines. I know the easiest ways to get around … what to use for this, what to use for that. It also has helped me advance ahead of the other students in ways that I know what it takes to extract stuff … what equations belong to certain things so it's a lot easier to do labs that way. So, I've benefited in the lab. My lab grades have shown a great impact in this."

Dennis Keiser, a metallurgical engineer, started as an INL intern as well. He is a constant supporter of the student programs.

"Here at INL, we participate in a lot of different areas of engineering and this gives an exciting experience for a student," said Keiser. "They can participate in these different areas and gauge what they're interested in and use this information to determine where they want their futures to go."

INL provides educational hands-on learning opportunities to more than 200 college and high school students every year. These internships allow only a glimpse of the future work force and its great potential.

"I never realized how much there was in research, how much research needed to be done and now seeing there are some very simple things that we don't know much at all about. Just being able to see what we can find out here is really interesting," said Dan Christensen, INL intern. "Research just sounds like it's always pushing the edge a little bit more. It's definitely exciting."